

John W. Adams
AN
ORATION,
ON THE 4
NECESSITY
OF
POLITICAL UNION
AT THE
PRESENT DAY:
DELIVERED AT THE BAPTIST MEETING-HOUSE,
IN PROVIDENCE,
AT THE
COMMENCEMENT OF RHODE-ISLAND
COLLEGE,
A. D. 1797.

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U
PROVIDENCE: Printed by CARTER and WILKINSON,
and sold at their Book-Store, opposite the Market.

M,DCC,XCVII.





A N
O R A T I O N.



THE present is an age of wonders, and an æra of revolutions. The most experienced politician, who has grown grey in the study of mankind, will find in the course of an hour all his expectations destroyed, and predictions overturned. Whatever in the times of antiquity existed only in fable, is realized and fulfilled at the present day.—Like the disconsolate hero of romance, we seem bound in a spell, and to behold at a distance flowery fields, unclouded skies, burning mountains, and rivers of blood. Let us then collect a fortitude of mind equal to the magnitude of the occasion, meet our misfortunes like men, and leave the rest to the disposal of Providence. This is all that feeble humanity can do. The force of habit, and strength of education, may enable us to resist this dangerous charm of novelty, which has already produced pictures of horror sufficient to curdle the blood in our veins.

Patriotism, that pride and boast of antiquity, has been vilified and disgraced, as inconsistent with that liberal affection which embraces the whole

whole family of man. But self love is one of the strongest principles of action. Nature commands, and man must obey. Objects dependant on our bounty for support, and fortitude for protection, must be connected by all the ties of kindred affection. Proud of these sentiments, we cherish with filial affection, and with reverence, the venerable image of our country's honour.—It is not the uncandid sneer of party malevolence, nor the viperous tongue of slander itself, that can damp the energies of a real American.—He feels, but he bears his misfortunes like a man.

Gratitude is due to benefactors; but if that nation that confers the favour renounces her former conduct, the debt is extinguished, and the obligation is cancelled. There was a time when every hand was ready to assist France, and every heart triumphed in the success of her glorious exertions.—With anxious solicitude we attended her through her splendid paths of glory and honour, till admiration itself was lost in the magnitude of her efforts. Little did we think that the light which we then hailed as the morning star of liberty, was a baneful comet rapidly approaching us, and denouncing destruction to the political system. The late depredations committed on our commerce have excited a strong and vivid indignation, which the lapse of future ages may cure, but never can efface. When France was first emancipated, a pure spirit of rational liberty seemed to have actuated her movements. But when flushed with glory and crowned with conquest, the beautiful picture of national felicity and domestic quiet was shaded by horror. The voice of humanity, like the inspired prophet, cried

cried only in the wilderness. Universal subjugation, and absolute dominion, seemed to be the only horizon which could bound the projects of France. Her conduct with regard to foreign nations will remain to future ages a monument of injustice. Italy has bled at a thousand veins.—That seat of science and sanctuary of genius—that grand deposit of all that was great and noble in the world of antiquity, has been levelled with the ground. Dreadful as these calamities have been, they afford a melancholy, but at the same time an useful and salutary proof, that disinterested friendship never exists among nations.—They teach us, that America must depend upon the strength of her own arm for protection. A bold and open enemy we meet in the field with confidence and spirit, but the suspicious friend carries daggers under his smiles.

Americans! while you justly resent the many injuries which you have received from the legislators of France, remember your long and glorious struggle for independence.—Great-Britain, who now assiduously courts your alliance, —who offers the hand of assistance, once attempted to destroy your very existence as a nation. Can you forget the time when her adverse legions, like destroying angels, scoured the land, bearing with them all the pestilence of Heaven in their course? No, the earth we tread shall be the page on which posterity may read the sufferings of America, charactered in the blood of her patriots.—Yet the cause of freedom was triumphant.—The armies of Britain, covered with confusion and dismay, were repelled, and peace and harmony restored to the continent.

“ Unequal

" Unequal contest ! at fair Freedom's call,

" The lowliest hind glows with celestial fire ;

" She rules, directs, pervades, and conquers all,

" And armies at her sacred glance expire."

America, young in action, and unversed in the hoary vices of Europe, has suffered much from believing that all the world is as generous, and noble, and disinterested, as herself.—She has hitherto relied solely on the rectitude of her own heart, and the chastity of her own character.—But the majesty of Virtue herself may be insulted and debased, when it is not guarded by discretion.—Experience, fatal experience, has yet I fear to teach us many lessons. But whoever reads the address of the President of the United States to the federal Legislature, at their late special session, which vibrates in unison with the feelings of every true American, will learn that we meet our misfortunes with the reluctant spirit of a man, and not with the calm stupidity of an ox. It is a fact too notorious to be denied, and it is with a mixture of pain and astonishment that I speak it, that two different parties have for a long time agitated and perplexed our national councils. Frivolous debates—tardy and timorous resolutions, have too much marked the character of our government. Europe beholds our situation, and rejoices. She contemplates with a rancorous satisfaction the day when this country shall once more become her miserable satellite ; or, what is tenfold more alarming, that this vast continent may be divided into petty republics, destitute of force and energy, dangerous only to themselves, and harmless to their common enemies. What in such an event can
be

be expected but mutual wars, jealousies and disturbances, anarchy and ruin? But I will drive from my breast such melancholy anticipations.—I will indulge the hope, that there is spirit, and valour, and fortitude in our citizens, sufficient to resist this greatest of evils. Fathers! Legislators of your country! reflect for a moment on the perilous situation of America. Remember that distracted councils palsy the nerves of government, and damp the vigour of her efforts. Is this a time for idle and unimportant debate, when the world is at its crisis? When the sacred name of patriotism is abused, the hoary locks of justice prophaned, and a disorganizing spirit pervading the universe? Soar above the vulgar prejudices of the moment—remain firm to your posts.—Impartial posterity will do justice to your actions. Methinks I hear the voice of our forefathers from their tombs exclaim, unite, my children, and you may yet be an happy people.—Divide, and your glory, honour, and national existence, are extinguished forever.

Fate wrote it with an iron pen,
And the loud thunder said Amen.

Verify the prediction of a sublime English poet :*

Beyond the vast Atlantic deep,
A dome by viewless genii shall be rais'd ;
Its walls of adamant, compact and steep,
Its portals with sky-tinctur'd gems emblaz'd.
There on a lofty throne shall virtue stand,
To her Columbia's warlike sons shall kneel ;
And while her smiles rain plenty round the land,
Bow, tyrants, bow beneath th' avenging steel.

Commerce

* Sir William Jones.

Commerce with fleets shall mock the waves,
 And arts that flourish not with slaves,
 Dancing with ev'ry grace and ev'ry muse,
 Shall bid the vallies laugh, and heavenly beams diffuse.

Yet if God in his wrath has ordained that this country shall fall—if discord like a Colossus must stride over this continent—if all the pleasures of social life must be destroyed—if liberty, that first of Heaven's blessings, must degenerate into the curse of unrestrained licentiousness; let us unite and rally round the government to a man. Let us march to the fortrefs of faction, and expire at the mouth of the cannon. Or if driven to the walls of the sanctuary, let us embrace the pillars of the constitution, and only in its ruins fall.—Let this freeborn American hand first dig my grave in liberty and honour; and though I found but one more thus resolved, that honest man and I would die together.

Finis.

